

2982

To: Don Hultman and Jim Nissen
From: Ken Visger
Subject: CCP

Dear Don and Jim:

As you know, I fully support your efforts to manage the refuge in a way that benefits as many people as possible. I also speak for the members of the Friends of the Upper Mississippi Fishery Services who endorsed Plan D and now support Alternative E. I have thought and wrote more on this subject than anything I ever did all the way through college. I never believe in reinventing the wheel so I am including below, all the thoughts I've had since the start of the CCP process. I think they will adequately convey my strong support and hopefully give you the strength to not further weaken the plan in spite of the criticism you have received.

I admire your courage and patience for enduring this planning process. Public input, although necessary, can be a danger to doing what's right and needed. Keep the faith! You're our last line of defense against the "no regulation" crowd.

Sincerely,

Ken Visger

TALKING POINTS FOR COMMENTS ON ALTERNATIVE E

1. Congress established Fish and Wildlife Refuge in 1924. All other refuges have much more restrictive access and use regulations. Upper Miss never intended for unregulated public use
2. Visitor numbers increasing every year. Over 3 million visits. Fish and wildlife cannot tolerate unlimited pressure from human from intrusion.
3. Hunter numbers decreasing every year while birding, photography, wildlife observation increasing. Can't continue to manage for hunters and fisherman alone. They are not the future for refuge support.
4. **Advocate for fisheries component in all EMP projects including those done in waterfowl closed areas. If improved fisheries result in disturbance in closed areas, advocate for closing those areas during waterfowl migration periods. Current Plan E suggests that fisheries component may not be included based on the conflict over human disturbance**
5. Note importance of hiring fisheries biologist to work with threatened and endangered species and to eliminate invasives.
6. Waterfowl hunting closed areas and their boundaries have not been changed in over 45 years. New boundary proposals are needed to better provide for food and shelter and reduce the number of firing lines and the unsportsmanlike like conduct they tend to produce.
7. Work with States to regulate fishing tournaments. FWS currently has no regulatory power over the number and frequency of tournaments or the regulations on those tournaments. Proposal calls for working with states to regulate.
8. Much criticism over proposal to build wildlife observation decks, hiking trails, photography blinds, etc. As mentioned in number 3, these projects will be needed and used and will build support for the refuge from an entirely new constituency. After the initial construction cost, these activities do not require as much expense to monitor and supervise as hunting and fishing activities. (No warden, stocking, etc.)
9. Proposal calls for guiding services to be regulated and licensed in reasonable ways. Important for safety considerations but also important to regulate those who are benefiting financially from a public resource. Same is true of trapping. Guiding services are increasing and conflicting with public use.
10. Boating and camping are no longer addressed in the plan except for a ban on glass containers out of your boat. There shouldn't be any objections from the boating and camping crowd.

11. Plan calls for a beach maintenance plan to be implemented with corp. Over 1.3 million use refuge for boating, camping, picnicking, and swimming. Necessary and overdue.
12. Electric motor and slow no wake areas are biggest controversy. Only 1.7% of refuge designated as electric motor area and 7.4% as slow no wake. Opponents simply want unrestricted access to any area of refuge. Modern motors have allowed people to access areas they traditionally couldn't use without paddling, poling, or walking in. Just because now we can doesn't mean we should. Controversies over ATV's and snowmobiles are similar. National roadless policy received more public comment than any other proposal and comments were overwhelming in favor of restricting access to wilderness areas. Refuge should have wilderness areas as well and restrict access from ever intrusive forms of transportation. Public supports these proposals consistently.
13. Dog policy is less strict under new plan than previous. Dog must be leashed during ground bird nesting season (Mar1-June30) and then allowed to be off leash but under control of owner if more than 100 yards from other people. This makes sense for birds and for out of control dogs on beaches, landings, etc. Hunting activities are exempt from these regulations.

There are lots of important proposals regarding land use, sedimentation, water quality, facilities, etc. but are not controversial.

Some will argue that the plan doesn't do enough for sedimentation and pollution but these happen off the boundaries of the refuge and can't be controlled by FWS.

Congressman Ron Kind:

Jan 18, 2006

Dear Ron:

Thank you for inviting me to your River Advisory Board on the 16th. I have some thoughts I didn't express at the meeting primarily because of the tone of those in attendance. I have to say that I didn't think the group of people at the meeting represented a fair cross section of refuge interests. As I listened to the comments, it was apparent that you are hearing from the same group of anti regulation hunters, fisherman, and trappers that have dominated every CCP meeting. I'm also an avid waterfowler and fisherman and spend many days on the refuge every year and have since the 50's. But I recognize that my history of using the resource doesn't automatically give me more authority over how it's managed. I have a very different perspective than your Advisory board on the way to manage the resource for everyone and preserve it for the future. I would submit that the future of the Upper Miss Refuge does not lie with the group at your meeting. You know that for every 100 Wisconsin hunters who stop hunting, only 50 are replacing them. Part of this lack of recruitment to the sport has to do with the attitudes of hunters toward regulation. You need only look at the controversy over baiting, ATV's, permanent blinds, earn a buck, and shot shell limits to begin to understand the publics disdain for the current hunter ethic.

I believe the future of the refuge depends on the support from those who appreciate the refuge for what it was intended, a haven for fish and wildlife. These people don't hunt or trap and most don't fish. They may bird watch, hike, canoe, boat or simply enjoy observing wildlife. They are the great majority of your constituents but are not organized and don't attend CCP meetings because they aren't tuned in to refuge issues like your River Advisory Board. I attended the Volunteer Recognition Banquet for the Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge in October and learned that their Friends group

had put in over 2500 hundred hours last year. Some of their work was eliminating invasives and restoration but most of it was spent on an observation platform helping to educate the hundreds of people who visit every year. When I asked if hunting was allowed on their refuge, I couldn't find a member who hunted or even knew. They represent the kind of supporters the Upper Miss Refuge will need to preserve it for the future.

I have spent the last 6 months, as a representative of our Friends group, speaking to a variety of community organizations from service clubs to AARP. I've discussed CCP with dozens of people and pointed out the controversial areas in the plan. With few exceptions, the public wants and expects the refuge to be regulated and controlled. When I was presenting Alternative D, I found little or no opposition to the issues that are so objectionable to your River Advisory Board. I suspect Alternative E would have been even more acceptable to these community groups.

I would encourage you to solicit a wider variety of opinions from a more diverse group of people on managing the Upper Miss. Though they may not always attend meetings, my experience has been that more people agree with the proposed management plan than oppose it. Public participation is important in decision making but it's vital to know the motive behind those who make the most noise. The science and rationale behind the CCP plan is reasonable and sensible. I urge you to support Alternative E and the future of the Upper Miss Refuge. I would be happy to discuss and defend the details of the plan if you choose. Thank you for your consideration.

Ken Visger

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I recently attended a couple of the public meetings for reviewing the U.S Fish and Wildlife Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in order to shape my own personal response to the draft proposals as well as that of the Friends of the Upper Mississippi River Fishery Services. Because the refuge, which stretches from Wabasha to Rock Island IL, has as more visits per year than Yellowstone National Park, a great deal of the plan is an effort to balance the many different recreational pursuits and still keep it a home for fish and wildlife. This is truly a difficult task and one that wasn't necessary 20 to 25 years ago. At that time there were far fewer boaters and the main kind of boat found anywhere on the river was a flat bottom with a 25 horse motor. There weren't airboats, jet skis, go devils, or many bass boats. Well, times have changed and so has the river. Backwater areas that were traditionally inaccessible to conventional motors are now frequented by these types of boats disturbing both wildlife and people who prefer the quiet beauty of these areas.

The recreational opportunities offered by the river have attracted thousands of people to this area, many of whom want a part of the river for themselves. This demand is only going to increase over the next 15 years. The river cannot continue to be everything to everybody all the time. Many people seem to view the refuge as simply public land that should have little or no restrictions on its use. I would remind them that the only reason we have this resource is because the refuge was created by Congress in 1924. Had it not been for their foresight, the river would have been levied and backwaters drained for farmland.

The Friends of the Upper Mississippi Fishery Services believe in balance between public use and protecting fish and wildlife and that compromising will be necessary so the Upper Miss as we know it will be there for future generations. Many of the changes being proposed by the Fish and Wildlife Service were suggested during meetings held the last 2 years with a variety of river users. Unfortunately, the recent meetings have been dominated by a group of waterfowl hunters and fisherman who are adamantly opposed to change of any kind. I find it interesting that, although nearly everyone believes the Upper Miss to be in serious trouble from sedimentation, pollution, invasive species, significant loss of habitat and conflicts between user groups, the overwhelming choice of the attendees at the recent meetings is Alternative A-NO CHANGE. The Friends group supports Alternative D, the preferred alternative of the Fish and Wildlife Service. It blends wildlife protection and habitat improvements with public use. It may not satisfy the personal interest of every river user but it comes closest to protecting the way we have traditionally used the river and begins to protect the river users who aren't organized, did not attend this first round of meetings or felt they couldn't express their opinions at the meetings.

I urge everyone who has an interest in the river to learn about the proposed changes (not just from rumors) and let the Fish and Wildlife Service know how you feel. Don't allow single issue users to determine the future of the Upper Miss.

Sincerely,
Ken Visger
President, Friends of the Upper Mississippi Fishery Services

I'm concerned that the CCP plan for the Upper Miss gives adequate consideration for fish and wildlife and sets aside portions of the refuge that are not disturbed by airboats hover craft or excessive motorized traffic. The refuge system was established for the benefit of fish and wildlife and they should be your first priority in your management plan. The future of refuges nationwide will depend on the support of those who value wild places. Managing for special interest users will only alienate your most loyal and important advocates. Please implement Alternative E as part of the Upper Mississippi Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

Congressman Mark Green

1314 Longworth House Office Building

Washington DC 20515

Jan. 13, 2006

Dear Congressman Green:

We feel it necessary to respond to an open letter you addressed to open house participants regarding the latest preferred proposal for the Comprehensive Conservation Plan on the Upper Mississippi Wildlife and Fish Refuge. It is clear that you have forgotten the intent of Congress when they authorized and funded the Refuge back in 1924. The purpose clearly stated that it was to be a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds, fish, other wildlife and plants. Congress did not proclaim this valuable resource as merely public land and never intended it to be unregulated.

Our members have attended many of the public meetings regarding both alternative D and now alternative E. It is very apparent that these meetings are dominated by a very vocal minority group of anti regulation sportsman, primarily duck hunters, air boaters and go-devil users, who believe that they should have the right to use the refuge in any way that suits their purpose regardless of the effect on wildlife, fish, and other people's enjoyment of the resource.

We are very disappointed in your support of this small group of refuge users. We would remind you that every citizen has an equal ownership in the Upper Miss Refuge. Your suggestion that those who use the river more than others should have the right to dictate a management plan is unfair to those who value the future of this great resource and are concerned about unregulated abuse.

I am sure you have read alternative E and know it does little to restrict boating and camping on the river. It does make necessary and overdue changes in the waterfowl closed area system, a system that hasn't been changed in over 45 years. The plan also offers both wildlife, fish and people some relief from the intrusion of noisy and disruptive airboats and hover craft in areas totaling only 7.4% of the Refuge. In addition, it designates a small area (1.7%) as an electric motor only area for those refuge users who prefer quiet and solitude.

None of these changes seem extreme except to those who demand unlimited access. I have spoken to many service groups and clubs in the last 6 months about the Refuge plan and have found little opposition. The great majority of people think the plan is reasonable and protects their interest in the resource. I would urge you to reconsider your opposition and consider all interests, not just those most vocal and organized. A noted outdoor writer recently said, "A sportsman who is not also an environmentalist is a fool." I would hope our elected representatives don't treat this precious resource foolishly.

Sincerely,

Ken Visger

President, Friends of the Upper Mississippi Fishery Services

The following was from an article in Fly Rod and Reel written by a well known Florida Keys fishing guide, Jeff Cardenas. I think his "memo to the Feds" is applicable to our refuge as well

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My biggest regret in these years? It would have to be writing about the Marquesas, and in particular a secluded corner of the atoll I called the Green Room. It was here in this rare and beautiful corner of the Key West National Wildlife Refuge that I had some of my happiest moments, alone and with clients. It was a special place that required an angler to tread very softly, and often, not at all. Now, the narrow entrance to this mangrove enclave is ravaged with propeller scars. Twenty-foot flats boats with 175 HP engines roar through the narrow channels. The baby tarpon have fled. The bird rookery is disintegrating. Fishing is about discovery, and some discoveries, I have learned, are best left unspoken. I have these final words to write about the Green Room:

Memo to the Feds:

All it would take to restore this rare estuary is to post it as a No Motor Zone. Make it difficult to access. Those who are in a hurry will not bother to make the effort. Those who have a true appreciation of wild places will. In a wildlife refuge, after all, the priority should be given to the wildlife and not the users.

My family, friends and fellow club members approve of Alternative E as we did Alternative D. My family and I use the refuge in many ways including hunting fishing, hiking, etc. We believe that the future of the refuge lies in broadening its appeal while at the same time making sure that there are areas which are left free from the over-intrusion of the invasive species responsible for more damage than all the others combined--man.

Please do not let the constant attacks of a small, well-organized and very vocal group sway you to alter the plan to suit the selfish desires of the hard-core duck-hunting, airboat-and-mud-motor-using crowd. I hunted ducks over 35 days this season and am often ashamed of the actions and opinions of many of my fellow hunters. Many pursue narrow self-interest and have no real concern for the long term preservation, protection and restoration of what they use.

My observation from attending several of your informational meetings is that, by their own admission, few from this group took the time to read and compare the Alternatives. They are highly misinformed and are taking their opinions from a few vocal individuals who misquote, misinform, lie and are generally distrustful of anything governmental.

I speak not only myself and my family of 5, but also for the members of our Friends group when I ask you beresolute and approve Alternative E.

Chuck Chihak, Sect./Treas.
Friends of the Upper Miss. Fishery System
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